

## Party preferences: consolidation vs competition

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Notwithstanding the long period of ambiguity of the rules of the game for the next parliamentary elections - it is still unclear whether the election system will be changed for the majoritarian or the proportionate only, or will remain the 50/50 mixed - most of representatives of political parties in the Ukrainian parliament appear to favor a proportionate electoral system. The first reading of a new draft election law that would envisage introduction of a proportionate system was held on November 18, 1999 and was supported by 320 MPs. However, little progress in this area has been done since then, and the final discussion of the new election law has been postponed indefinitely.

In a way, current views about the would-be electoral system reflect the situation of 1997, when the proportionate system was favored by two major political forces with real grassroots organizations and party history: the Communist party and the Rukh. A national daily reported yesterday that "Communists and the Rukh members" represented in the parliament's Committee for State Building and Local Self-Governance "believe that holding the elections based on a proportionate system will accelerate political restructuring of the society and contribute to enhancing accountability of deputies to the people" (Ukraina Moloda, November 16, 2000).

However, President Leonid Kuchma appears to have a different opinion on the system to be used to elect a new parliament. He believes that the proportionate system-based elections could be held when "there is a bi-cameral parliament in Ukraine". But if the implementation of the April 2000 referendum results is delayed, "in that case the President speaks radically in favor of a mixed electoral system" (UT-1, November 17, 2000). According to President Kuchma, nowadays in Ukraine "there is an unjustifiably large number of political parties. But whom do they represent, the President asked, and answered: everybody just wants to leapfrog to become [people's] deputies" (UT-1, November 17, 2000). However, the obscurity of future electoral chances notwithstanding, Ukrainian political parties continue developing and acting, gradually changing the national political landscape. Alongside with quantitative changes and proliferation of left-wing and right-wing parties alike (to date, 106 political parties have been registered), the processes of qualitative changes are under way, directly linked to issues of leadership and transformation of political orientations and interests.

A classical example of the above is the transformation of the right-wing side of the Ukrainian political spectrum. Some substantial changes have occurred in the Ukrainian Republican Party (URP) that has lost much of its appeal and electorate within the past years but, due to the image of its "heroic past" remains a well-known and "indicative" political party. On November 10, 2000, the party's 11th congress elected one of its earlier leaders, Levko Lukianenko, to chair the party again. The decision was supported by 284 delegates, while the active party chairman, Oleksandr Shandriuk received the support of 233 delegates. Levko Lukianenko, 73, chaired then prominent URP in late 1980s - early 1990s. When asked to comment on his return to the party leadership, he explained the party's choice by the fact that for some period of time "the former party leadership's willingness to continue supporting Yevhen Marchuk [whose bid for the presidency the URP endorsed in 1999] had caused dissatisfaction of the party members and led to rather serious contradictions within the party" (Tovarysh, #45, November 2000). Nowadays, "after the attacks on the government personified by Victor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko who have done quite a few positive things such support is no longer possible," the new URP chairman said (Tovarysh, #45, November 2000).

In September 1999, shortly before the presidential election, Levko Lukianenko argued: "[I] have known him [i.e., Marchuk] since 1990. <...> [I] believe that they [i.e., the right-wing political forces] will back Marchuk in the election... He is not going to become more left than he is, neither now, nor later" (Pravda Ukrainy, September 14, 1999). However, the political map has changed since then and political interests and affiliations have been adjusted accordingly. Commenting on his earlier support for Yevhen Marchuk at the 1999 presidential race, the would-be comeback URP chairman, the honorary chairman and official representative of Yevhen Marchuk in the 1999 campaign Levko Lukianenko explained: "I also stood for Yevhen Kyrilovych [Marchuk] for I thought that at the point he was the most suitable [candidate] for the role of the head of the state. However, our agreement with Marchuk was not made properly, i.e., rights and commitments of the parties were not specified. Our candidate lost and joined Leonid Kuchma's team that he had resolutely criticized during the election campaign. Meanwhile, the URP is an opposition party" (Silski Visti, November 2, 2000).

The new ex-chairman of the oldest Ukrainian democratic party Oleksandr Shandriuk who, according to Levko Lukianenko "have done almost nothing for two years" (Silski Visti, November 2, 2000) is

unlikely to remain idle. There have been suggestions that Mr. Shandriuk and his followers might plan to establish a new version of the Republican Party, but it is still hard to judge whether such intentions are adequate to his resources and whether that will lead to a public split-up of the URP.

Hence, the pro-Yushchenko wing of the URP has been victorious at the recent party congress. The transformation may be regarded as significant not only to the party but to Levko Lukianenko himself. After the public dispute between Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Yevhen Marchuk and some key figures of the Ukrainian government the URP, notwithstanding the relative long relationship with Marchuk, switched to public support for the Yushchenko government and changed its orientation at other political actors accordingly.

In the past parliamentary election (March 1998) the URP joined a right-wing election block, the National Front, a consolidated effort bid of the URP, Ukrainian Conservative Republican Party led by Stepan Khmara and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists. At the early stage of the National Front's campaign the joining declaration was also signed by the radical right State Sovereignty of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Christian Democratic Party, the Lviv regional organization of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Transcarpathian, Chernivtsi, and Luhansk regional organizations of the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh, and even the Luhansk regional organization of the People's Democratic Party. Later on, however, those forces either embarked on independent campaigns or joined other groups. The National Front expected to gain votes of supporters of nationalism in Western Ukraine and radicalism of the kind advocated by the URP in Central Ukraine. In general, the block consisted of five political parties and 12 public associations, and competed with the Rukh for the same electorate.

In 1997-1998, however, no consolidation of the Ukrainian right-wing forces, primarily the National Front and the Rukh, occurred. Leader of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (CUN) Slava Stetsko admitted that the right-wing parties "could succeed should they join efforts with the Rukh" but still criticized Vyacheslav Chornovil's idea about transforming the Rukh, the Prosvita and the CUN in a single political entity (Kievskie Vedomosti, March 14, 1997). In her view, "the Rukh leadership did not want unification but only wanted to lead those who wished to work under the auspices of the Rukh" (Vechirniy Kyiv, March 5, 1998). As a result, the National Front failed to overcome the 4-percent threshold introduced by the Law of Ukraine "On Election of People's Deputies of Ukraine" for political parties and blocks. The National Front received only 721,966 votes, and its representatives could make it to the parliament only as winners in three majoritarian constituencies. Meanwhile, Slava Stetsko got almost 57 percent of the votes in the majoritarian constituency #89 of the Ivano-Frankivsk region.

Hopefully, national democrats can learn the lesson and will manage to avoid mistakes and separations suffered by practically all political parties representing the right wing of the political spectrum. Unless both parts of the Rukh and other right-wing parties reconcile to the idea of forming a viable block, the Ukrainian right have no chance to win. Some signs made by the right indicate growing understanding that winning the forthcoming election without consolidation of efforts will be highly problematic for any of them, particularly given the deep crisis that undermined the Ukrainian national democratic movement after the break-up of the Rukh. Nowadays, a variety of situational coalitions and partnerships are being considered. One of the initial steps has been made by the parliamentary alliance of the Reforms and Order and the CUN MPs into the 15-strong Reformy-Congress faction. However, notwithstanding promising signs and efforts, no real unification of the two Rukhs has occurred so far.

Although both of the Rukhs have declared their strategies as aiming at support of the Yushchenko government, they appear to target different governmental forces. The Ukrainian People's Rukh (Kostenko) has been favored by Vice Prime Minister for Fuel and Energy Yulia Tymoshenko and is very close to her political party and parliamentary faction, the Batkivshchyna. At the end of January 2000 it was announced that "UPR and the Batkivshchyna party have signed a political agreement to establish in the parliament a block of factions acting within the parliamentary majority" (Segodnya, January 18, 2000). The document stipulated coordination of public speeches and voting solidarity. Nowadays this relatively lasting alliance and particularly the affiliations and interests that back it critically reduce chances for forming an alliance with other right-wing forces and particularly "the other Rukh". And it looks like the idea of such an alliance finds too little support in the Presidential Administration... Leaders of the Udovenko Rukh seem to be aware and apprehensive of the uncertainty of prospects for making such a block and some dilemmas that may arise in connection with links between the Rukh (Kostenko) and the Batkivshchyna. As Taras Chornovil, MP, put it, "I had a meeting with President Leonid Kuchma. At during [the meeting] he voiced deep interest in unification of the NRU, PRP and UNR [i.e., the Rukh (Udovenko), the Reforms and Order and the Rukh (Kostenko)]. However, the head of the state was negative about the inclusion of the Sobor [led by Anatoly Matvienko] and the Batkivshchyna in the process, for he believes that would take us beyond the confines of the parliamentary majority and unite [us] with the left forces" (Ukraina Moloda, November 2, 2000).

While prospects for unification of the right-wing forces appear to be hindered by serious obstacles, the Rukh (Udovenko), the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Reforms and Order seem to be increasingly motivated to bring the Rukh (Kostenko) closer to their prospective alliance. The official publication of the Rukh (Udovenko), the Chas, wrote on November 17, 2000 that "the political block of parties: the People's Rukh of Ukraine, the Reforms and Order and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists addressed members of the Central Provid [i.e., the Board] of the Ukrainian People's Rukh with a proposal to join the block." According to the statement, similar proposal was made before, on February 14, 2000: "then we expressed our belief that "the establishment of Ukraine as an economically developed, democratic European state is possible through the only way - through the unification of all patriotic forces of our state" and invited the Ukrainian People's Rukh "to join the process of forming a coalition". Hence, the right-wing block has matured to ask a straightforward "yes or no" question. Noteworthy, the address reads: "We believe that a block of right-centrist forces may not be confined to our four parties only; all parties that have political agendas similar to ours' will be invited to join. The statement, however, does not specify any parties with "similar agendas". Meanwhile, so far the Rukh (Udovenko), supportive as it is of the Yushchenko government, is reluctant to show rapprochement with the center-left Batkivshchyna. According to Hennady Udovenko, "there can be no mechanical merger of the two Rukhs" and "the party's positions among the electorates will not grow better because of the merger". However, in September 2000 Hennady Udovenko did not exclude "a probable possibility of negotiations with parties of the Christian direction" (Ukraina Moloda, September 15, 2000).

Centrist parties are also aware of the need for joining efforts and building coalitions and blocks. The distribution of forces in the "center" has changed since the 1998 elections, with the emergence of the Democratic Union (Volkov), the Working Ukraine (Derkach, Pinchuk, Tihipko, Sharov), and the growing "Solidarity" (Poroshenko). Substantial changes in the sector have been signified by the congress of the Working party on November 18 that elected former Vice Prime Minister and former Minister of Economy Serhiy Tihipko, MP, as the party's new leader. Other leadership positions were offered to Andriy Derkach to become the chairman of the party's political executive committee and Yuly Ioffee to become the head of the political council. According to the media reports, "the issue of blocking with other parties for taking part in the 2002 parliamentary election will be addressed by "the laborists" only after the congress" (Interfax Ukraina, November 13, 2000). Therefore, let's wait for a while...

November 18 was a remarkable day for Ukraine's recent political environment. Five political parties - the Party of Regional Renaissance of Ukraine, the Solidarity party, the Party of Labor, the Party for the Beautiful Ukraine and the All-Ukrainian Party of Pensioners - announced a merger under the leadership of the Solidarity party that has been making rapid progress in receiving increasing media attention and building up its political score. A few months ago, on July 18, leaders of the five parties (encouraged by the Solidarity leader Petro Poroshenko) issued a joint statement about their agreement in principle to merge into a single political party. Initially the unification congress was planned to take place on October 21, 2000. Later on, the organizers explained the delay by purely technical reasons: "Some of the regions did not manage to hold regional party conferences on time to elect delegates for this congress, [therefore] the unification had to be postponed till a later date, November 18" (Vlada i Polityka, October 27, 2000). However, on November 17 leaders of the would-be unified entity had to face an unexpected and rather unpleasant surprise: five representatives of the Peasants' Party and their leader Serhiy Dovhan, one of the "founding fathers" of the Solidarity faction in the parliament, left it. Yet, the separation of the "Peasants" will hardly be a serious impediment to the ability and ambitions of Poroshenko's Solidarity.

Although the next parliamentary election in Ukraine is scheduled to take place in about 18 months, the time passes fast enough for new political formations to hurry up to become known by potential voters. The process of political party promotion is costly and difficult; it requires substantial outreach efforts and development of local structures. The notorious "administrative resource" remains a strong factor that influences the election outcome. As the experience of previous campaigns shows, the use of the "administrative resource" stimulates political parties and improves their chances to win; therefore, stronger political parties are seeking to ensure favorable treatment by local authorities. This is particularly true about "renewed", "replicated" and newly-created entities. Unlike the more traditional Ukrainian political parties, they have not developed qualities and specific features that could be recognizable for their potential voters. Therefore, they have to produce and advertise new images for potential voters and interest groups. A number of recent opinion polls show that should the election be held today based on the proportionate system, the parties that made it to the parliament two years ago would most likely do it again and would hardly be challenged seriously by the newcomers. The 4-percent "barrier" would be taken by the Communist party, the Socialist party, the United Social

Democrats, the Rukh chaired by Hennady Udovenko, the People's Democratic Party, the Greens, the Reforms and Order, and Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna. Some problems with overcoming the qualification threshold would be faced by the part of the old Rukh now chaired by Yuri Kostenko and Oleksandr Volkov's Democratic Union (see Holos Ukrainy, November 11, 2000). While the list may not be an absolutely accurate one, it still reflects general trends and perspectives on political parties, as well as the general electoral inertia. Therefore, new political formations have to accelerate their self-promotion efforts. The results are likely to be observed in the near future.